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ABSTRACT

Basic information about selecting an educational opportunity abroad is presented. While the chief focus is academic programs, information is included that is relevant to work, travel, and volunteer service opportunities in other countries. Questions are posed to help the student judge the suitability and quality of programs. Procedures to follow to obtain academic credit for study abroad are also recommended. The following five types of study abroad programs are described: direct enrollment in a foreign university as a regular student or as an occasional or special student; a special program for foreign students at a foreign university; independent study, internships, or experiential learning; a program sponsored by a U.S. college or university; and a program sponsored by an organization other than a college or university. The following considerations in selected an academic opportunity abroad are addressed: program sponsor, program objectives, admissions requirements, curriculum, faculty, program and host country resources, orientation, program administration, housing, costs, and travel arrangements. Eighteen specific steps for students to follow are also outlined. (SW)

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# STUDENTS ABROAD

## A GUIDE FOR SELECTING A FOREIGN EDUCATION

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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR FOREIGN STUDENT AFFAIRS

# STUDENTS ABROAD

## A GUIDE FOR SELECTING A FOREIGN EDUCATION

Prepared by the Task Force on Study Abroad
of the
American Association of Collegiate Registrars
and Admissions Officers (AACRAO)
and the
National Association for Foreign Student Affairs (NAFSA)

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# Foreword

This booklet is designed to provide some basic information about selecting an educational opportunity abroad. Its chief focus is on academic programs, but it also includes some information relevant to work, travel and volunteer service opportunities in other countries. Questions are posed to help you judge the suitability and quality of programs in which you are interested. Procedures are recommended for you to follow if you want to receive academic credit for study abroad. The bibliography lists resource materials which can help in the selection process.

The preparation and publication of this booklet were made possible by a grant to the Field Service Program of the National Association for Foreign Student Affairs (NAFSA) by the Associate Directorate for Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. International Communication Agency. The publication will be of considerable benefit to the growing numbers of students interested in experiences abroad, and to those on college and university campuses assigned to advise them about opportunities in other countries. It can be obtained from the NAFSA Central Office, 1860 19th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.

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## Table of Contents


I. Introduction/1
II. Your Objectives/3
III. Types of Educational Programs and Sponsors/5
—Types of Study Programs/5
—Non-Academic Programs/7
IV. Academic Credit/9
V. Financial Aid/11
VI. Selecting an Academic Opportunity Abroad/13
—Program Sponsor/13
—Program Objectives/14
—Admissions Requirements/14
—Curriculum/15
—Faculty/16
—Program and Host Country Resources/16
—Orientation/17
—Program Administration/17
—Housing/18
—Costs/18
—Travel Arrangements/19
VII. Steps to Follow/21

# I. Introduction

*"Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry and narrow mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one corner of the earth all one's lifetime.*

*—Mark Twain*

The world is getting smaller and more interdependent, and it is imperative for everyone to become better informed about other peoples and cultures. Intercultural understanding does not have to entail large-scale or high-level international relations. Learning to order a meal in a French restaurant, discussing the proper way to cut hay with a farm worker in Norway, taking notes in Spanish at the University of Madrid, teaching an orphan child in Korea, visiting a coffee plantation in Brazil, or going on a summer study program in Kenya can broaden your horizons and your understanding of other people, and could even be part of a dramatic life-changing experience. Study, work, travel or volunteer service abroad can significantly add to your knowledge of other cultures. They also can help you gain a better perspective and a broader understanding of your own country and its way of life.

The number and variety of overseas opportunities are a surprise to most people. Many universities in other countries permit foreign students with appropriate educational backgrounds to enroll in regular degree programs or as non-degree students. Some also offer special

programs in language and culture for foreign students. Hundreds of U.S. institutions sponsor study abroad programs for summer, fall or spring terms, for the entire academic year, or for interim periods. Many non-university organizations and agencies offer study abroad programs. There are also large numbers of individual and group travel and volunteer service programs, as well as many short-term work opportunities in other countries.

The number of programs is not important. Their quality is. Some programs are excellent, some mediocre, some virtually worthless. Moreover, no one kind of program, no matter how good it may be, is the perfect choice for everyone. Selecting the right opportunity for you is the most important factor in assuring a successful experience. You are considering a major decision which will require a lot of thinking and research on your part. The following sections are designed to help you define your goals and provide information so that you can select a program which will enable you to fulfill those goals. You should begin with yourself.

## II. Your Objectives

Why do you want to go abroad? This may seem like a simple question, but it is one of the most important ones you will need to answer. Take some time in defining your goals. Perhaps you want to gain intensive training in your major field, or increase your competency in a foreign language. Or you may just want to live in another culture.

In identifying your goals, you should also ask yourself how you might adjust to different cultures and totally new situations. How would you feel about stepping off a plane not knowing where you would spend the night . . . or the next six months? *You* are now a foreign student! Each person would react differently to this situation. Some would find it exciting and challenging; others would feel apprehension. People react differently because they have had different experiences. Some students can adjust to another culture quickly and easily; others need some assistance. Some programs provide this by offering orientation sessions, for example, or by helping students find housing.

Once you have identified your objectives, you can begin matching them with the stated objectives of educational programs abroad. The following questions are designed to help you define your goals. *Remember, there are no right or wrong answers to these questions, only what is right for you.*

- Why are you interested in going abroad?
- What do you want to do abroad? Study? Travel? Work? Help people?
- If you want to study, do you want to study intensively in your major field? Or are language and cultural studies more important?
- How deeply do you want to be immersed in the culture? Do you want to attend classes with students from the host country, or mainly with other Americans? Do you want the classes to be on the American model, or on another model which may involve much more independent work? Do you want to live with a family or students from the host country, or would you prefer living with Americans?
- Where would you like to go? Do you want to spend most of your time in one location or travel to several places? Do you prefer cities or small towns?
- Is foreign language proficiency necessary to study or work in the country you have selected? If so, do you have the necessary proficiency, or do you have plans to gain it before you go?
- When do you want to go? How long would you like to stay?
- How much money could you afford to spend? Would you need financial assistance in order to carry out your plans? For which kind(s) of financial aid do you qualify? Can this assistance be used abroad?
- If you are planning to study abroad, do you expect to earn credit for it?
- Would going abroad alter your graduation plans?

## III. Types of Educational Programs and Sponsors

Once you have identified your goals, you should become familiar with the various types of opportunities available. This section will explain the five main types of study abroad options. Some information is also included on work, travel and volunteer opportunities.

### A. Types of study programs

1. Direct enrollment in a foreign university as a regular student or as an occasional or special student.
2. A special program for foreign students at a foreign university.
3. Independent study, internships or experiential learning.
4. A program sponsored by a U.S. college or university.
5. A program sponsored by an organization other than a college or university.

**Direct enrollment.** You might decide to go abroad independently and make all your own arrangements for transportation, housing and enrollment in a foreign university. If you choose to enroll directly, you must be proficient in the language of the host country, be relatively independent in nature, and have strong academic preparation. Some foreign universities offer special language programs to bring one's language proficiency up to acceptable standards.

Such a program may be required before your enrollment in the foreign university's regular classes.

Procedures for direct enrollment vary from country to country. You should begin planning about one year in advance of the enrollment date. In doing your research, you should learn about the educational system of the country in which you hope to study. There are major differences between the U.S. and foreign systems.

**A special program for foreign students.** You might decide to enroll in a special language and culture program at a foreign university. Such programs are designed for foreign students, and would enable you to study with students from other countries.

**Independent study, internships or experiential learning.** In contrast to the traditional classroom setting, some colleges and universities offer *independent study* arrangements. Here the student pursues an in-depth study or research project in a selected field or on a special topic. The student accepts responsibility for completing the study or conducting the research and writing a report on the experience.

Internships in a variety of professional fields are available through colleges, universities and educational organizations. Students may frequently enroll in one or two related classes during the period of the internship. The internship offers practical learning experience in a governmental, professional or field setting, usually under the guidance of persons involved in the particular field.

Experiential learning is a third type of individualized program, largely unstructured but built around essential objectives and guidelines. Such learning takes place when a student is mentally and emotionally immersed in a physical or cultural environment over an extended period of time. From interaction with others and the environment, the student makes observations and draws conclusions which follow guidelines established for the experience.

**A U.S. college-sponsored program.** You might want to participate in one of the hundreds of programs sponsored by U.S. academic institutions specifically for U.S. students. Some enroll you in a foreign university. While in many cases you could do that yourself, some U.S. college-sponsored programs offer assistance in other matters such as housing, advisement and opportunities for intern-

ships which may be important to you. Some programs offer special courses just for U.S. students. Some of these have American faculty; others hire foreign faculty. Some programs operate in partial or total isolation from the host culture; others provide ample opportunities for interaction with local residents. Generally all of these programs have two things in common:

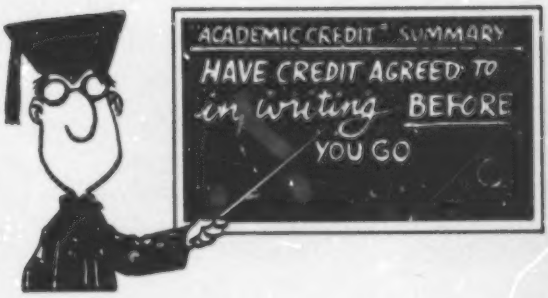
1. They enable a U.S. student to study in another country while earning credit toward a U.S. degree.

2. They take the responsibility for making some or all of the academic, housing and travel arrangements for students.

**An organization-sponsored program.** There are many organizations other than U.S. colleges or universities which operate study abroad programs. The sponsoring organization might be U.S. or foreign based. Some are non-profit; others are proprietary. Some are subsidiaries of corporations. Some have had long experience in international programming; others are newcomers in the field.

## B. Non-academic programs

Although an educational opportunity abroad is frequently thought of only as a study experience, the two need not be synonymous. A work experience may be educational. For example, an internship might be involved, working on an archaeological dig, helping in a volunteer service program, or even an ordinary type of summer job such as working in a hotel which provides an opportunity to increase language proficiency. Travel can also be educational if it is well planned, organized around a theme, and combined with extensive reading. Although this booklet focuses primarily on academic programs, many of the questions also are relevant to work, travel or volunteer service experiences, and these kinds of experiences should not be overlooked as educational alternatives. You may be able to obtain valuable information about the reputation and reliability of program sponsors by consulting your college foreign study office.




## IV. Academic Credit

Institutional policies concerning the granting of credit vary greatly among U.S. colleges and universities. If you hope to earn credit for the program that you have selected, you should determine who at your institution is responsible for granting credit. In most cases the study abroad office, admissions office or registrar's office can provide you with this information. It is recommended that you secure a written agreement from the appropriate official on your campus when your plans are approved. Unless you get the proper approval for credit *before* you go, you run the risk of receiving little or no credit for your educational experience abroad.

## V. Financial Aid

Financial aid policies vary among institutions. Few special scholarships for undergraduate study abroad are available, but it may be possible for students to use the financial aid for which they are normally eligible. In some cases, however, there may be restrictions on the use of such assistance for study abroad. If you will need financial assistance to carry out your plans, you should consult your institution's financial aid office and your study abroad adviser.

PSST! WANNA GO OVERSEAS, KID? I GOT JUST TH' PROGRAM FOR YOU! FOR ONLY $995 DOWN WE FLY YOU OUT AN' ENROLL YOU AT ERSATZ U.! THERE'S A WEEKEND BARGAIN RIGHT NOW ON OUR "NO-FAULT" INDEPENDENT STUDY PROGRAM...

## VI. Selecting an Academic Opportunity Abroad

After you have decided when, where and what you want to study, that information can be used to focus on programs that meet your criteria. You will find a number of programs which appear to meet your needs. But a word of caution. Don't make your selection too hastily or until you have applied the guidelines suggested in this publication. Programs vary greatly in quality. Study carefully the printed materials distributed by program sponsors. There are literally hundreds of study programs competing for students, and all of them try to make their literature appear as attractive as possible. If the information is not straightforward and complete, ask for more or investigate other programs.

Read the following sections over now to get an idea of what you should consider. After you have familiarized yourself with printed materials of several programs and are about to make your choice, refer back to these sections. Finally, *be sure to consult your academic adviser and your study abroad adviser.*

### A. Program sponsor

It is best to avoid those programs which are vague about their purposes, structure, leadership, experience, resources and operational details. Be especially cautious if a program asks for a large advance deposit, gives no office location or seems

to be a one person operation. In order to avoid involvement with a questionable organization, you should find answers to the following questions:

- What organization operates the program in which you are interested? What kind of organization is it?
- What is the primary activity of the sponsoring organization? Is education only a sideline?
- How much experience has the organization had in administering study abroad programs? What is its reputation in this field?
- What is the address of the organization's headquarters? What is the U.S. address? (If the address is a post office box, be cautious.)

## B. Program objectives

At least one of the many educational opportunities available should be appropriate for you. Most programs have several objectives. Sometimes they are not clearly stated in the printed materials, but you will be able to identify them if you study the admissions requirements, curricular options, housing arrangements, and plans for involvement with the residents and resources of the host country. One program may emphasize development of language proficiency. Another may be established to offer advanced training in a field such as studio art or Renaissance history. Some almost totally immerse their students in a foreign culture; others simply use foreign facilities and make no attempt to use the academic assets of the foreign setting or to involve students in the host country's culture. Many programs are designed for junior-level students, while others are open to more than one academic level. Some are designed for graduate students or permit graduates to enroll. Some programs offer a full academic year of study, while others involve a semester, a summer, or a brief interim term. You need to ask:

- What are the program's objectives?
- How do they match your own objectives?
- Is the length of the program sufficient to achieve your objectives?

## C. Admissions requirements

Most programs are organized with a particular type of student in mind. Some are for superior students and others for average students. Some are for those who are highly proficient in the language of the host country, while others will accept students with little or no foreign language background. Admissions requirements should



161

state the requisite grade point average (if any), language preparation (generally stated in years of college-level study), and appropriate class level (i.e. sophomore, junior). Be wary if the requirements are far below your level of ability, or if they are so broad that almost anyone could qualify. For example, a class that mixes freshmen, juniors and graduate students might not be satisfactory to any of them unless it is a course in language, art or music; still the proficiency level or abilities of the students should be similar. It is not advisable to apply for a study program for which you do not meet the stated minimum admission requirements.

- What are the language requirements? Are they too high or too low for your objectives and your level of preparation?
- How will your placement in courses such as art, language and music be determined? Do the procedures seem to be reasonably effective, or superficial?
- Do you have the grade point average, academic level, and prerequisite courses which are required?

## D. Curriculum

Some programs offer courses in a variety of fields; others specialize in one area such as literature, environmental science or art history. Some programs offer a chance to enroll in one or more courses at a foreign university; others do not. You should be aware that while it is sometimes possible for a program sponsor to arrange for you to take courses at a foreign university, that may not necessarily mean access to the department of your choice. You may be admitted to a foreign university, but there may not be enough space in the university's history department, for example, or you may not meet the special admissions requirements of that department.

Other important factors to consider include library facilities; nature, purposes and number of field trips; availability of classes for students of varying levels of ability, especially in languages; and use of local resources and people in the courses.

- What courses are offered? Will they enable you to meet your objectives?
- If enrollment in a host country institution is involved, is it a secondary level or post-secondary level institution in that country's system of education? Is the level appropriate to your academic preparation?

- If you will be enrolling in courses offered by a host country institution, will they be courses normally taken by host country students or courses designed for foreign students?
- Who will make the necessary arrangements for you to enroll in the host country institution?
- Are field trips included? If so, are they relevant to the curriculum or are they primarily tourist activities? Will the field trips be led by your professors or by tourist guides?

## E. Faculty

If you expect a satisfying academic experience, faculty should possess credentials at least as good as those faculty members at your home institution and those of host country institutions of higher education. They should hold degrees from officially recognized universities and have teaching experience in the subjects they will be teaching.

- Are the qualifications of faculty members described?
- What degrees do the faculty members hold?
- Are the faculty members Americans, citizens of the host country, or some of each? Have the U.S. faculty members had prior experience in the host country?

## F. Program and host country resources

A major reason for studying in a foreign country is to make the environment and culture part of the curriculum. Large cities offer more plays, concerts, operas, museums and art galleries. Smaller cities and towns have some of these resources and, in addition, usually provide greater opportunities for significant contact with local residents.

- What is the relation between the program's location and the resources needed to accomplish the program's objectives? For example, will you have easy access to plays, concerts, museums, libraries and other resources which you would like to make an integral part of your educational experience?
- Do you have proficiency in the language of the host country adequate to enable you to use library materials or work on educational projects that involve talking with host country people?
- How will the program foster your contacts with host country citizens?
- Will your contacts with citizens of the host country relate to your objectives in seeking an educational experience abroad, or will they be incidental and peripheral? For example, will you have an opportunity to meet and engage in discussions with students and professionals involved in

the areas of study in which you are interested? Or will most of your contacts be with landlords, shopkeepers and other persons unrelated to your academic activities?

## G. Orientation

Experience has shown that students benefit from orientation programs, both before departure and after arrival abroad. It is important that you be aware of what you may encounter, so that you can prepare yourself to adjust to new situations and thus benefit from the experience. After having been away from the United States for a period of time, you may have difficulty adjusting to life at home, especially if your stay was a lengthy one. Re-entry programs are designed to help you make use of the knowledge and experience acquired abroad and may also help you consolidate and interpret learning gained from the international experience.

- What orientation activities will you be involved in before you leave the United States?
- What reading will you be doing in preparation for the study experience?
- Will the program sponsor help you contact alumni of the program for information?
- What orientation activities will you be involved in after arrival in the host country?
- What type of re-entry activities will you be involved in at the conclusion of the program?

## H. Program administration

Whether a study abroad program is excellent, mediocre or poor depends to a great extent on its administrative staff. Many programs have an administrative staff in the U.S. and a resident director and other staff abroad. The resident director is in charge of the program in the host country. The duties of the administrative staff should include academic and personal advising, arranging housing and health services, and acting as liaison with host country institutions and officials.

- Is there someone specifically responsible for academic and personal advising?
- Is there a program office open at regular and convenient hours, with either the director or other program staff regularly available to assist students?
- What arrangements are made for medical service and emergencies when needed?
- Does the program issue a transcript showing grades, dates attended and credit earned?

## I. Housing

It may be possible to live in a dormitory with students of the host country, in a private home, in a hotel, in an apartment or with a group of other Americans. Some program sponsors offer a choice; others offer only one type of arrangement. In some cases, students must make their own housing arrangements. Before selecting a program, you should know what alternatives (if any) will be available to you.

- What types of housing are available? How and by whom will housing arrangements be made?
- If the program sponsor makes housing arrangements, how will your preferences be taken into consideration?
- What action will the program sponsor take if you want to change your housing accommodations? What are the conditions for changing?

## J. Costs

You should have an accurate idea of how much the period of study abroad is going to cost. Major costs include round trip transportation between your home and the program site, tuition, books, room and board, sickness and accident insurance, and local transportation at the study site. There will be additional expenses that must be estimated, including admission to cultural sites and events, gifts, optional travel (often an unexpectedly large item), bank charges for money exchange, fluctuations in dollar exchange rates and inflation.

In some cases, students pay one fee which covers housing, meals, tuition, field trips, health and accident insurance and transportation. In other cases, the fee may cover only some of these items. It is important to determine what is included in a program fee. An experienced sponsor, or former participants in the program, should be able to give you a good estimate of how much extra money you may need over and above the quoted program price.

- What items are covered by the amount of money the program sponsor asks you to pay?
- How will you pay this amount? What is the payment schedule?
- Under what circumstances will a refund be made in case of accident, illness or family emergency?
- Will you be able to pay more than the total current estimate of expenses if increases prove necessary because of inflation or change in currency exchange rates?
- What additional items should you consider in your budget?

## K. Travel arrangements

Sometimes a program sponsor arranges group travel for all participants to and from the study site. In other cases participants must make their own transportation arrangements. It is wise to learn about the reliability of the organization which will handle your flight arrangements. Ground transportation is also a sizeable expense, as is optional travel during your stay abroad. If these items are not included in the amount you must pay the program sponsor, the sponsor should be able to offer you a good estimate of how much extra you should budget.

- What information has been provided concerning the arrangements for your travel to the program site and your return home?
- Will you be able to travel on your own after the program ends, or do travel arrangements require that you return home with the program group at a specified time?
- What carriers does the program sponsor use or recommend for international travel? Are they reliable and fiscally sound?
- How do international travel costs quoted for your program compare with fares on regularly scheduled flights?

Study, travel, work or volunteer service in another country can be an exciting and rewarding experience. A carefully chosen and planned program can provide you with innumerable opportunities for interaction with another culture, thereby increasing your awareness of cultural differences and similarities. Regardless of the type of program you select, you will grow personally and when you return you will be a different person.

## VII. Steps to Follow

___ 1. Identify your reasons for wanting to go abroad.

___ 2. Identify several specific study opportunities that meet your needs, and write for information and application forms.

___ 3. Discuss your plans, including possible academic credit, with your study abroad adviser, academic adviser and someone in the admissions and records office.

___ 4. Discuss the program with any of its recent alumni you can reach.

___ 5. Re-read section VI of this publication.

___ 6. Choose one or more specific study opportunities that meet your needs and submit formal applications.

___ 7. Before you go abroad, obtain an agreement (preferably in writing) concerning academic credit from the appropriate official at your home college or university.

___ 8. Increase your knowledge of the host country and its language through courses, individual reading, discussion with professors and others who have been there, and with foreign students and professors from that country. Write to its embassy or information service for additional information.

___ 9. Increase your knowledge of U.S. history, geography, government and cultures, so that you will be able to answer questions while abroad.

___ 10. Apply for a passport and for any visas which may be required.

___ 11. Make transportation arrangements well in advance of your intended departure date.

___ 12. Have a physical and dental checkup, and obtain any special vaccinations and inoculations which may be required or advised by your physician.

___ 13. Be sure you have health and accident insurance which covers you for international travel and during your stay abroad.

___ 14. Purchase traveler's checks and obtain an international credit card or letters of credit.

___ 15. Obtain an international student I.D. card.

___ 16. Before leaving your home, make arrangements to receive housing, financial aid and preregistration materials for your first term back at your home institution.

___ 17. Check climate information to determine what clothing you will need and pack accordingly. Add small items typical of the United States that could be used as gifts (life savers, frisbees).

___ 18. Carry your suitcase five city blocks, then repack.